

Educational Approaches to dealing with the past in school to oppose political exploitation of history

Workshop No. 4

Prepared for the conference: "Remembering the future: the role of youth and adult education in working with the past and reconciliation processes"

12 – 13 December 2011, Bonn

Albert Hani
Deputy Country Director
Forum Civil Peace Service
str. Borka Talevski 11/4, 1000 Skopje
Republic of Macedonia
tel. fax: +389 (0)2 3228 099
cell. +389 (0)70 243 534
hani@forumzfd.de
albert_hani@yahoo.com
www.forumzfd.mk

Organizer:

DVV International -Institute für Zusammenarbeit des Deutschen Volksochschul - Verbandes

Partners:

Columbia University, Institute for Study of Human rights

European Association for the education of adults

Academy for conflict transformation, *forumZFD*



What is CPS – Germany?

It is an instrument of the German Government, that publicly funds peace and development organizations. Civil Peace Service (CPS) stands for long-term deployment of trained peace consultants who cooperate with local partners to enhance dialogue and civil society structures in conflict regions

- CPS is an instrument of BMZ (Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany) that Supports, consults and funds local experts and project activities of CSOs
- Program that started in 1999 by Government organizations and NGOs and exists in 50 countries with 583 PB experts;
- Program that deploys European Experts to national and local CSOs. The CPS always works with local partners in its projects in order to identify opportunities for fostering peace which exist in civil society and to strengthen local forces for nonviolent conflict settlement.

Organizations in CPS:

ForumCPS (forumZFD)
Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF)
Association for Development Cooperation (AGEH)
Christian Services International (CFI)
German Development Service (DED)
Church Development Service (EED)
EIRENE - International Christian Service for Peace
WorldPeaceServices (WFD)

What is ForumZFD?

It is a forum of German peace organizations, with offices in Germany, on the Balkans (3), Philippines, Israel and Palestine. The office in Skopje is well known as Peacebuilding organization that gives its contributions to peace and security in Macedonia. We are relatively new organization in Macedonia considering that it started in 2007. We work in partnership with other local Peacebuilding organizations, by trying to consult and support their initiatives and activities. In a way that is how I started to cooperate and work for *forumZFD*. Nowadays we can say that we are a profiled Peacebuilding organization that has its specific approach and specific focus areas. *forumZFD* Skopje is concentrated on **(1)** contributing to easing interethnic relations among students and teachers in schools, **(2)** providing conditions for political dialogue on sensitive topics among different stakeholders, and **(3)** connect the decision making structures with the grassroots, civil society as well as with the business sector.

How do we define DwP?

Process that focuses on memories (individual and collective) that has influence for the future. Its connection Peace we see within the dimension of **stereotypes** and **prejudices** as well as **enemy images** that are **created by misperception of issues in the past**. *The process in which individuals try to justify their stereotypes and prejudices as well as hate, construct a turmoil of understanding of the past and the future which than is passed on to the younger generation.* The young ones accept the uncertainty and lack of information and wrong type of memory and take it for granted, a fact that then constantly threatens peace and harmony of coexistence. The easiest explanation of this is process comes if it is seen as also part of concept of forgiveness.

Nation- building processes, in transition period, created new **Ethno-political elites** in Macedonia, which **use memory and history as a means for homogenization of ethnic communities**. Perhaps they think that diversity is something that threatens exclusive ownership of the state. *Evil perpetrated in the name of*

collective memories of nations, along with the desire to cover up the past wrongdoings, is a wishful thinking of many.

Macedonia is a society emerging out of the collapse of Yugoslavia. As the other ex-Yu countries, Macedonia has also been affected by violent interethnic conflict in 2001. **Forgiveness** is kind of rooted in tradition of each community, but it has never found a common ground across the ethnic boundaries. While Macedonians worship forgiveness in a special Christian holiday, Albanians have designed a special process of reconciliation in which forgiveness takes the biggest role (Reconciliation is even a common given name). Yet it is taboo, perhaps even **early to talk about collective forgiveness of history**. What one can witness is **collective fight for preserving exclusive ownership of the past**, in a time line that goes back to ancient history. All this is done for just one reason, **to show who has ownership of the present time**. As if relations among people were frozen from those ancient times up to now, as if there was no process of melting and disappearing of small nations, as if the world today is populated like in ancient times, as if the values of information and technology is the same since then.

What are some of the core projects we are working on? Why?

1. **Youth Leadership Program (YLP):** This is a program that we lead jointly with a local organization, the Training Center for Management of Conflicts. In this project we are aiming at identifying potential future leaders of Macedonian society and support their capacity building process and their personal development. This program we see as a nice entry point in to the issues that really matter to youth. It focuses mainly on Peace building and human rights concepts, although the title does not directly refer to a “multi-culti” activity. Program is focused on post conflict zones and involves ethnically mixed groups in the process of Peacebuilding education.
2. **Mediation project:** Initiative of partners of *forumZFD* and a program that has been derived from the need of the students from the YLP, who were always reminded us that what we do with the YLP is good, but we need to think of setting up a sustainable system with which such topics will be brought up every day in the schools. Mediation was found to be a subtle entry point to introduce sensitive topics of Peacebuilding: Reconciliation, nonviolence, stereotypes, prejudices, tolerance, multiculturalism, gender, human rights etc.). It started as a pilot project in the most violent schools in Skopje.
3. **Affirmative action:** Project that aims at promoting the concepts of Affirmative action measures, equal employment opportunities and diversification of workforce. Concepts that in substance aim to recover injustices done from the past. Our project focuses on empowering the private sector to take more responsibility for the past by offering more possibilities for access of marginalized groups in process of production and services. This project we implement jointly with the ministry of Labor, SIOFA and relevant local NGOs that tackle this topic.
4. **Tetovo City of peace:** is an initiative of the city of Tetovo (Post conflict zone) that suffers from its negative image. With this project the municipality tends to merge all Peacebuilding activities of the municipality and NGOs in to a campaign that will break down that image of a problematic city. Within the frame of this project *forumZFD* mobilizes the cooperation and the efforts of local NGOs and helps to develop and support new Peacebuilding initiatives.

5. **Run for Peace:** activity that mobilizes all primary schools in Municipality of Gazibaba, Harchinovo and Petrovec. Children from these schools mark the Peace day with sports, dancing and running laps in the name of Peace. It initially a fundraising activity that mobilizes the local authorities, teachers, students and parents. This project has implemented on yearly basis in cooperation with the municipality of Gazi Baba In Skopje. This year the municipality of Gazibaba took over completely and organized the project on its own. *forumZFD* was invited as a guest.
6. **Forum discussions:** conceptual system of addressing ad-hoc burning and sensitive issues that have to do with Dealing with the past and Transitional justice, such are: Identity, Lustration, integrative education, history, monuments etc.
7. **Youth clubs:** *forumZFD* in cooperation with local youth organizations and financial support by UNICEF is running two Youth clubs, one in Struga and the other one in Kicevo. The clubs offer space for all ethnic groups to meet for extracurricular activities, like arts, sports, dancing, and language courses. A group of young leaders is taking actively part in organizing activities for their peers and for younger children. Both municipalities gave premises for free and pay for the running .

Why School Mediation?

From all these projects, for the purposes of the conference, I would like to give special attention to the mediation project because it is directly connected to the topic of this event. By that I will try to present some of the key messages related to DwP and youth.

- (1) **Peace is unfortunately becoming hard word to be used in practice** because it creates aversion among most of the politicians. The ethno- political elite finds it hard to hear words such as: Interethnic tolerance, multi-ethnic, multiculturalism, Peace, Inter-ethnic understanding. For some reason this terminology is often **used in their rhetoric's just to please the foreigners**. While their activities on the ground give opposing messages to these concepts. By constantly receiving these messages from the politicians, large parts of the population have started to create also an aversion towards the terminology and often make fun of it. Even the NGOs invented terms like "multi-vitamin" or "multi-culti" just to make fun but also to try if this is now more acceptable.

For me as local it is not easy to approach teachers, local authorities or government representatives and try to explain the novelty of the Peacebuilding values. If I face a person from a same background as mine, the atmosphere of aversion starts and that leads to leads to either refusal of the project or making fun of it.

- (2) **Segregation becomes a trend:** The parallel worlds that are created by working against the concept of coexistence and cohabitation, contribute directly towards segregation of the society as well as segregation of the education System. The danger in **segregating education system lies in producing one-sided collective memories that are often wrong about the others**. Children get raised with these memories and they live with these memories until they are faced with reality on the job, streets or with neighbors. Than problems start! The segregation process was tackled seriously by international community and local NGOs. The sincerity for implementing concepts of integrative education, by the state representatives within the MoE, is questionable. I say this mainly because a lot is spent but not much is done concretely to overcome potential future threats from interethnic violence in the schools.

- (3) **Youth is misused by political parties:** instrumentalization of youth for political purposes becomes profession for some evil forces within the national or local politicians. Whenever there is a need to gain

sympathies by the voters, these “experts” will shift their focus on their biggest concerns, fears of the voters and try to find the enemy next to them. Not even thinking about the damages in the future, which can hardly be recovered by a large army of peacebuilders.

- (4) **Is history about politicks or politicks is about history ?** is the dilemma I personally have. What I witness in Macedonia is that politicians saw a big benefit from the concepts of dealing with the past. They mainly use it in negative terms. They focus on only their truth and they enter deep in to the past just for the sake of finding something interesting to be celebrated, something that glorifies more their nation. They emphasize these findings without having a slightest thought on the dangers from cross-cultural gap that they are creating.
- (5) **Teachers lack capacities** and support by the education system, as well as by the official education curricula, to face directly the conflicts and violence in schools.

Therefore i consider that mediation represents:

- **A broader topic** and an alternative terminology to Peace. Something that raises both, personal and institutional interest to work with;
- the beauty of introducing school mediation lays on the fact that it is **not necessary related to interethnic or interreligious issues;**
- To us it represents a life long learning skill that **could be useful for personal purposes as well;**
- A topic that **covers almost all related topics of Peace and a topic that requires necessarily to open the issue of DwP;**
- A topic that **gives concrete results in reducing violence** in the schools and **improving interpersonal relations** among the diversified workforce of teachers in mixed schools (tangible) ;
- A topic that is **easily accepted by Schools** (Principals, teachers, parents, local/national authorities and normally students);

Why Institutionalizing school Mediation?

We in *forumZFD* consider that working on the topic of mediation in schools is not enough. To come to terms with Peace and to see concrete results needs a more systematic support by the state structures. Considering that our energy and finances are limited, we have put a considerable effort on institutionalizing mediation, by that making this project more sustainable. For us this meant a comprehensive system of creating synergies among the local stakeholders that could help the idea to place Mediation as a topic inside the curricula. Initially our work was focused on previously identified six of the most violent secondary schools in Skopje (according to a internal assessment of the Bureau for development of education). From the beginning we wanted to make sure that we have in place visible indicators that could measure the success. Therefore we first started to train, motivate and empower teachers to accept mediation as something that helps the schools and as something that helps them personally. However, to use the methods learned in practice and to seek for concrete results, needs a systematic support of the trained teachers. Teachers need recognition of their effort as well as support by the curricula, so that they can count their work on mediation as a working hour. Many similar projects do the same mistake all the time. They support such projects but they forget that if the base of the existence of the project is money, it will fail, mainly because of limited sources. One needs to find a creative solution which from one side

recognizes their effort and from the other side rewards them with counting it as normal working hour of the teacher.

forumZFD had been successful in responding to the need of teachers to institutionalize school mediation. In very close cooperation with the Bureau for development of education, which gave recommendation for such a project, as well as with close cooperating with the ministry of education, nowadays school mediation is recognized as a topic within the so called “**project activities**”. Teachers that are trained in school mediation, teachers that are lacking hours to fulfill the necessary number of hours with their subject, can freely engage themselves in teaching students on becoming student mediators. Several schools that have been highly motivated have already produced peer mediators. Now, the project will not depend on the transferred knowledge to only one generation in one project, that later leaves the secondary or primary schools. Teachers stay there and now they have one more additional task, to constantly train peer – mediators, support them and prepare them for mediating real cases in the schools. The ones that practice this experience already see results from such activity. They even show readiness to motivate other schools to work on it. The groups of teachers that are trained at this stage are motivated to spread the idea.

Such initiative is worthless without support and involvement from the beginning of school authorities like the Director of the school, school board, parent’s council .They represent the only way to use school mediation in practice, within the school environment. In their yearly planning they need to plan activities related to school mediation, get it approved by the school council and by the council of the city as well as by the ministry of education.

The key of the success of such project we consider that lies in **deliver to the people what they want and need, as well as making sure that need is understood on the top of decision making structures**. As NGO we consider our duty to shift our focus of interest from only working with grassroots, to close cooperation with the government structures. Many local NGOs fear to cooperate with the government just for the sake of preserving their independence. However the philosophy of only criticizing shows the lack of capacities of NGOs to try to find constantly systematic approaches to discussing issues of public interest. We tend to support local NGOs in communication with the government as well as with local authorities regardless of their ethnic or political belonging. **Therefore we consider that DwP work in multitask level approach. A shift of interests from micro to macro level could influence the curricula.**

The key of success is also in constant support of initiator of the project (in this case *forumZFD*) to the key driving forces (students, teachers, parents, directors, ministry, bureau for development of education etc).

Our **future plans** are to spread out this project on national level, reach out to primary schools, but also to try to establish sustainable system that provides knowledge of such type to the new teachers even in universities.

What do the modules consisted of?

Trying to answer this question we come to ultimate conclusion that the modules for teacher trainings on mediation consist of almost all topics related to Peace. Our philosophy of designing the mediation modules is based on the need to elaborate topics such are: Communication, stereotypes, Prejudices, Conflict management, Conflict analyses, Peacebuilding, Human rights, Reconciliation, dialogue, Dealing with the past, Nonviolence, etc. **We consider that a prepared mediator must be an open minded person that is**

freed from the burden of the past. A person that is ready to always create conditions for dialogue on the past, a person that lives what he or she is preaching, a person that believes in Peace, tolerance and understanding etc.

The **modules have their flow in the direction of reconciliation**. Teachers at the beginning are prepared theoretically with other topics and practice and broaden their abilities, so that they are ready to deal with sensitive issues such as: Interethnic dialogue, DwP, transitional justice, etc. This means that in the beginning we invest in raising their knowledge on topics such as: communication, nonviolent communication, conflict management, conflict analyses, mediation, negotiation, stereotypes, prejudices, multiculturalism etc. Then in special modules designed for them we bring in a phase where they discuss sensitive burning issues that have to do with their past and joint future. In most of the times here we talk about **issues that they had never before had chance to hear from** their colleagues from other nationalities. By carefully closing each burning issue we try to move on working more on more practical mediation tools, conflict analyses tools, different theories etc. We also provide study trips to experienced school mediation projects in the region and then we provide constant support in their trainings for the other teachers as well as for the students. At the end we support them in practice with the real cases.

Conclusions:

- Education system must provide **constant dialogue** on the past.
- It should be **freed from influence of politics** in it and the curricula should reflect the reality;
- DwP as interdisciplinary topic should be a **transversal topic** in most of the subjects that belong to the social sciences such as: *Sociology, Psychology, History, Philosophy, as well as art, music etc.*
- **Parallel working agendas of the politicians on the issue of the past** of their own nation, should stop because the created symbols will only remind us on enemies that lives next to our door in , our neighborhood. They should either find some joint agenda on preservation of collective memory and Dealing with the Past (DwP), or simply stop doing whatever they do now! It will bring us to more troubles in the future.

December 2011, Bonn

Albert Hani

